

RAISING THE BAR IN CALIFORNIA CLASSROOMS

Office of the
Secretary
for Education



California has embarked on a multi-year program to lift the academic achievement of all students at every school. We have adopted clear, uniform, rigorous standards for what every student should learn in every grade. By aligning curriculum, textbooks, teacher training and assessments to those standards, the state has raised the bar for achievement for all students. California's academic content standards are nationally recognized as among the toughest and best in the country. Making sure that every student learns successfully with standards-based instruction is a great challenge, but one the Davis administration is committed to meet.

Where California schools were before standards... For many years, parents couldn't tell how their children's schools measured up compared to other schools in California or in the nation. Public confidence in schools was low. California schools were ranked low, and students performed poorly on national tests. Expectations of schools ranged from minimal to very high.

In 1997, California first designed a set of standards, specific and measurable benchmarks of what students should be expected to learn in every grade. The standards are an explicit blueprint for learning aimed at preparing California students to become proficient in critical thinking, writing, advanced mathematics, science, history, social sciences and the arts. It wasn't until 1999 that California implemented a comprehensive program for ensuring that standards-based instruction is adopted in every school. With legislative adoption of Governor Gray Davis' Public Schools Accountability Act, the state created its first system for measuring school improvement year-to-year, comparing schools on the basis of student academic achievement, rewarding growth in academic achievement and intervening in persistently low-performing schools.

Where California schools are now... Tremendous progress has been made over the last four years to ensure that every student has access to standards-based textbooks and instruction, that every teacher is trained in the standards, that extra assistance is offered to help students meet the high standards, and that statewide tests measure student progress toward achievement of the standards.

Standards-based Tests. Despite public misperceptions, California already has a statewide pupil testing program that is aligned to its rigorous standards. Last year, the testing program was streamlined to place an even greater emphasis on standards-based tests aligned to curriculum, while continuing to provide parents valuable information on how California students are doing compared to other students in the nation.

This year, a major milestone will be reached with the reporting of student proficiency levels statewide on the California Standards Tests in English Language Arts, math, history/social science and science. For the first time, year-to-year growth on the California Standards Test in English language arts will be reported. Because California chose to set the bar high for student achievement, it is expected that early scores will not show high levels of proficiency. As has been the case in other states, such as Texas and North Carolina, staying the course with standards-based instruction should lead California's students to greater proficiency over time.

The Office of the Secretary for Education advises the Governor on all education policy. For more information regarding the Governor's current education initiatives, please visit www.ose.ca.gov • Summer, 2002

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Where California schools are now, continued....

Materials. So that all students have the benefit of top level instruction, in the past two years, math, English language arts and English language development materials aligned to California's rigorous standards have been adopted at the state and local level and placed into classrooms. Now teachers can more easily pinpoint content standards where students need assistance. Another critical milestone reached this year is the requirement that all materials include additional strategies for instruction of English learners and special education students. Already, a record \$2.4 billion in standards based textbooks and instructional materials has been provided to schools through their districts since Governor Davis took office. This year, Governor Davis has proposed to streamline textbook programs and increase funding for standards-aligned texts to reach \$600 million in 2006.

Teacher Professional Development. In order for every student to master the standards, teachers need to be prepared to use newly adopted instructional materials. Under Governor Davis, California has already trained more than 70,000 teachers in standards-based instructional methods. Over the next four years, university-level, research-based training in math and reading standards will be offered to every teacher of core academic subjects. The training will also be offered to 22,000 instructional aides. Funding for this program is contingent upon districts placing standards-based materials into their classrooms.

Extra Assistance for Students to Meet High Standards. At a time when more is being asked of students, Governor Davis has increased funding every year to provide \$493 million in this year's budget for intensive remedial instruction, algebra academies and intensive reading programs for students struggling in core subjects. Yearly, 1.2 million students get the help they need in programs offered throughout the school year and into the summer. Additionally, a \$250 million statewide standards-based program has been targeted to improve the English language and literacy skills of students who are experiencing difficulty learning English and difficulty in reading.

Higher Standards for teachers and school administrators. Not only have higher standards been implemented for students and schools, this year, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing adopted tougher requirements for teachers seeking credentials. Teacher education programs must now be aligned to rigorous academic content standards for students. Teachers must pass a performance assessment before earning a preliminary credential. And all beginning teachers must complete the two-year Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment program before earning permanent credentials. High, uniform standards have also been adopted for school administrators and for the first time, training aligned to these standards will be provided by the state.

Accountability Reflecting Standards. In October, the state's Academic Performance Index (API) will report progress made over the past year on the California Standards Test in English Language Arts. Next year, California Standards Tests in math, history and social sciences will be included in the API, and growth targets set for schools based on their baseline performance this year.